

# Occurrence of Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Tockus camurus* in the Republic of Bénin

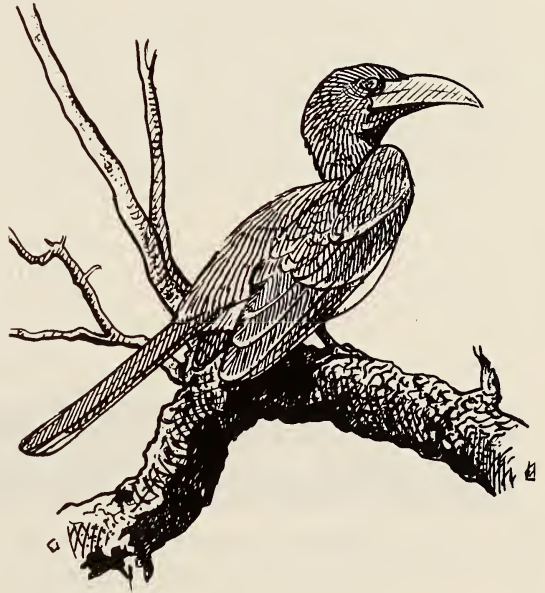
Patrick Claffey

Le Calao Pygmée est très sporadiquement distribué en Afrique Occidentale du Sénégal jusqu'au Nigeria, à l'exception du Togo. Fry *et al*<sup>1</sup> le dit présent au Bénin dans le texte mais l'espèce est omise de la carte de distribution, et l'auteur n'en a retrouvé aucune référence dans ses recherches dans les archives depuis le siècle passé. Néanmoins ces deux observations récentes, l'une dans la Forêt Classée de la Lama au sud du pays, et l'autre dans un site de forêt secondaire au centre, confirment la présence de l'espèce en République du Bénin. En même temps il y a quelques observations sur le comportement d'une espèce qui, à cause de son habitat préféré, n'a été que relativement peu observé.

Fry *et al*<sup>1</sup> report, somewhat ambiguously, the occurrence of Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Tockus camurus* from Bénin. Although Bénin is mentioned in the introductory text it is omitted from the distribution map. No records were apparently available at that time to support its occurrence in the country. Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire<sup>2</sup> did not include the species on their Republic of Bénin list, but the error also appears in Kemp<sup>3</sup> who considered its distribution to include Bénin, and it is possible that this is the source of the *Birds of Africa*<sup>4</sup> errors as Kemp's papers were used extensively in preparing the Bucerotidae accounts. Fry *et al*<sup>1</sup> state that it is an "endemic, resident of lowland forest" species. According to published information it appears to occur, sporadically and sparsely distributed through suitable habitat, from Sierra Leone to Nigeria, with the exception of Togo and Bénin<sup>1,3,4,5</sup>. Two recent field records for the Republic of Bénin are, therefore, of interest and mean that the species can be unequivocally stated to occur in the country.

P. Coubeou reported *Tockus camurus* from the Forêt Classée de la Lama, (6°55'N–07°00'N and 02°04'E–02°12'E), sometime in April–October 1994<sup>9</sup>. This is apparently the first Bénin record. No details are included in the report and I am unsure of its authenticity as the species was not recorded by Walter & Mühlberg<sup>8</sup>, during a detailed study of the same area which revealed the presence of two other species of forest hornbills—African Pied Hornbill *Tockus fasciatus* and the rare White-crested Hornbill *T. albocristatus*. *Tockus fasciatus semifasciatus* has also been recorded in Lama Forest<sup>9</sup> and in the Forêt Classée de Ouari Maro in central Bénin (Claffey in prep.). Elgood *et al*<sup>3</sup> note that *Tockus camurus* is 'heard more often than seen' and it is possible that it has been overlooked in both Bénin and Togo.

I recorded *Tockus camurus* on 19 and 25 October 1998, a single bird on both occasions, in a small area of old secondary forest c5 km south-east of Bétérou (09°12'N 02°16'E). This is considerably further north



Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Tockus camurus* by Mark Andrews

than Coubeou's observation, in an area where there is a little remaining forest and much secondary outlying savanna growth, such as at this site. The upperparts were distinctively brown, with white spots in the median-coverts, a feature which I noted on the second visit. The underparts were white. The species is unmistakable because of its red bill. The bird seen on 19 October was probably a female as there was black in the tip of the bill.

The behaviour of the bird is also of interest and certainly explains why it is easily overlooked in dense growth. I noted it as 'squirrel-like' as it climbed branches in the upper level of the trees in a 'flattened' position, parallel to the branches. The long tail was held in the same manner, adding to this impression. Its movements were very agile, and, without viewing the bird through binoculars, could

easily have been overlooked as a large squirrel.

Given this description and the habitat preferences of the species, 'extending into secondary forest and isolated forest patches'<sup>4</sup>, these records confirm the presence of *Tockus camurus* in some of the small remaining forest patches in the Republic of Bénin.

### Acknowledgements

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